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ywca  
st. joseph county

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The Honorable Senator Richard Lugar  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Lugar,

I am writing to respectfully submit an FY09 appropriations request for \$868,000 in the Commerce/Justice/Science Appropriations bill that would fund the **YWCA St. Joseph County's Programs for Victims of Domestic Violence**.

Briefly, we seek to expand our Court Watch program and legal advocacy services and to establish a Civil Protective Order Court and Judicial Technology Initiative. Expanding Court Watch will allow YWCA to increase the number of cases that are being monitored by adding paid positions for court monitors. We have relied on volunteers, which has limited the periods of time that monitors are available, and made it nearly impossible to monitor felony cases with their frequent delays and erratic hearing schedules. Paid monitors will enable all cases to be monitored, resulting in increased data collection, and more detailed reporting. Local judges tell us that the program is valuable and has had an impact on the system, and we are eager to build upon these successes.

YWCA will also work with judges to establish a Civil Protective Order Court to effectively address issues with civil orders of protection in St. Joseph County. Civil protective orders are currently granted in Traffic and Misdemeanor Court, where domestic violence and sexual assault victims are frequently called upon to tell their story, alongside individuals contesting parking tickets and other common misdemeanors. The atmosphere is hectic, crowded, and difficult to navigate for survivors of violence. The courthouse will convert a law library into a hearing room, and hire a part-time magistrate. Funds will also be used to fund a bailiff and recording equipment needed to establish the court. Once established, the local Commission on Courts will recommend allocating funds to maintain the court and personnel in the future.

This year, St. Joseph County will become part of a statewide Judicial Technology Initiative. As a partner site for this new electronic protective order project, the YWCA will house an officer of the court to process civil protective orders on-site. Using technology to facilitate protective orders will improve domestic violence victims' interaction with the court system by reducing trips to court, and streamlining the paperwork and process. Once in place, we will extend these services to mothers whose children have also experienced violence in the home, extending protective orders to children and making referrals to Child Protective Services (CPS) when necessary. Start up costs related to adding technology, staff, and staff training are included in the amount requested.

We look forward to meeting with Amy Oberhelman, your Legislative Assistant for Appropriations and Transportation, and Projects Director, on February 8<sup>th</sup> to discuss the need and purpose for this funding. You will also find this described in detail in the attached summary document.

I know that your process is a very competitive one, but I know that you understand the need for this funding in our community and hope that you put it high on your priority list for FY09.

Sincerely,

Linda S. Baechle  
Executive Director



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